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ALDERMAN, 8TH DISTRICT

One more consequence to police staffing shortages: Arson

**Statement from Alderman Bob Donovan
May 4, 2017**

When I pass along important public information about public safety issues, I try to point out that my interest is NOT specifically in placing blame. Rather, I am looking to inform and to be up front with the citizens of Milwaukee.

There are consequences to having a depleted level of staffing in the Milwaukee Police Department. As I've said previously, there is a reason people wait for hours for officers to show up after a call for service, and there's a reason we aren't seeing the traffic enforcement that we need so desperately now. And there is a reason we don't see foot and bicycle patrol officers in all of the neighborhoods that truly need them.

And now I am hearing something very troubling that is also directly related to depleted/decreased MPD staffing: That approximately half of the fires in the City of Milwaukee are classified as "undetermined" in origin. Additionally, I am also told that half of all city fires are arsons that go uninvestigated.

Cuts to the MPD Detective Bureau over the years have created manpower challenges for our arson investigations, and have also resulted in a huge decrease in our homicide clearance rate (murderers going un-arrested).

For suspected arson cases, it is absolutely imperative that we have experienced, seasoned veteran detectives who know what to look for. When we are understaffed (usually with less veteran detectives/officers) and stretched too thin, we have negative consequences!

Each time the Milwaukee Fire Department dispatches crews to a scene, those firefighters are in danger and at risk of losing their lives. I shudder to think how our arson staffing situation can impact insurance rates across Milwaukee!

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Milwaukee needs to create an Arson Task Force composed of members from the state Division of Criminal Investigation, the ATF, MFD and yes – detectives (several) from the Milwaukee Police Department. I believe the detectives selected should be assigned to this endeavor, and nothing else.

Again, I am not blaming the MPD or the MFD – they are making do the best they can with the resources they have. But that's also the problem, and everyone in Milwaukee is paying the price and lives are on the line.

Time to fix the problem.

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